

## stay in the car by GhostGrantaire

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**Summary:**

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## stay in the car

### Author's Note:

sorry this took so long?

Oh also I changed my mind-- I'm no longer doing one one-shot for each month. It'll still be 12 parts, but the timeline isn't that constant.

*Leave me here a little bit longer*

*I think I wanna stay in the car*

*I don't want anybody seeing me cry now*

-Rose Colored Boy, Paramore

*Thanksgiving parties like this are what gave Thanksgiving a bad rap, Steve thought as he looked around unhappily at the Johnson's living room. What are you thankful for this season? Oh well, I'm thankful for my extremely large house which I'm going to show off as our nice neighbors can come get filled with jealousy as they see all of our nice things.*

He called bullshit.

But still, Thanksgiving was family time, meaning that Steve's parents had bribed him into making an appearance at the Johnson's annual party with a new stereo. Miriam and John Harrington were nothing if not persuasive. He wasn't even sure where his parents were at this point, no doubt talking up some business hot shot and his wife so the family could get even more money than they already had.

There was a cloth banner across the foyer, the words in elegant cursive against a floral background. Steve stared at it for a moment, wondering what exactly he was thankful for right now.

Not getting eaten by Demodogs, probably.

“Hey Steve, psst.”

Steve frowned at the small voice from behind him. He looked around, unsurprised when his eyes landed on Mike peeking out from behind

the wall, waving him over. He sighed, taking his last sip of champagne (which was really the only perk of these parties) and excusing himself to the other room.

“Alright, what are you guys up to?” He asked as soon as he was out of hearing range of the adults. Mike and Lucas were huddled in the corner, both looking miserable in their nice clothes.

Mike shot him a look. “We’re getting the hell out of here.”

“You’re what?” Steve deadpanned back, raising his eyebrows. God, this kid was dramatic. Had he been this dramatic as a child? Probably, he answered for himself.

“Getting out. I can’t take another old lady I don’t know pinch my cheeks and ask if I’ve got a girlfriend,” Mike grumbled unhappily.

“It’s terrible,” Lucas agreed, nodding eagerly. “They’re all drunk too.”

The three of them took a moment to look back at all the adults in the room, laughing a bit too loudly with drinks in hand. Lucas wasn’t wrong.

Steve sighed again, feeling like he was arguing with children... which he quickly realized he, in fact, was. “So why are you telling me this?”

“We need a ride,” Lucas explained.

Steve snorted, shaking his head at him. “No way. I’m not getting in trouble for kidnapping some kids from a holiday party. Especially considering the number of times you kids go missing anyway.”

“You’re not gonna get in trouble,” Mike shot back.

“Yeah, I told my mom I felt sick and that I’d walk home,” Lucas said. “Which honestly I do after eating that pie Ms. Gabriel brought.”

“My mom knows I’m leaving too,” Mike agreed. “She just think I’m gonna hang out with Nancy at home. She’s always trying to get us to spend more time with each other.”

Steve frowned at him. “How is she gonna think you’re with your sister if Nancy’s here all night?”

Mike dropped his eyes, doing a nonchalant shrug. "Well..."

Steve dropped his head to his chest. "Nancy's coming too," he finished.

It made sense. Nancy and Mike could cover for each other easily while both of them got to go hang around people they actually wanted to see. All they needed was a car.

"Come on, Steve, please? My mom trusts you," Mike said. "And it gives you an excuse to skip out on all this, right?"

Steve glanced over the crowd. He did hate these parties. He remembered being Mike's age and having the women coo over you and pat your cheeks and all the guys tell you all the things they'd believe you do with your life. It was somehow worse now that he was older-- the men now felt the need to criticize his life choices as soon as they found out he didn't want to pursue business or law, and the women still cooed over his looks, but in an uncomfortably different way.

"So where are you actually going, if not home?" He asked begrudgingly, and Mike perked up immediately.

"Will's," he answered, and Steve felt his heart sink even more. "Dustin and Max are gonna meet us there."

Steve sighed. "Don't you think you guys bother the Byers family enough?"

"It's not actually Thanksgiving dinner! They're just watching movies tonight. Mrs. Byers said it was okay," Mike argued back.

"Okay, okay," Steve gave in, raising his hands innocently. "You ready now?"

"Give us a second, we promised the others we'd bring dessert," Lucas said quickly, and the two of them darted off.

Steve stared after them, wondering why he let himself be manipulated by kids. He shook his head, wondering if he should just go wait in the car or what.

As he looked around, his eyes fell on a familiar face, making his chest tense. He was going to have to talk to her anyway, he decided. With a heavy sigh, he made his way over to where she was sipping unhappily on a cup of water.

“Hey,” Steve said. *Nice greeting, Harrington.*

Nancy blinked in surprise and looked up at him. Her eyes went wide immediately, filled with that unease and guilt that always seemed to be present on her face nowadays. It made Steve sick, but he did his best to ignore it.

“You ready to go?” He continued.

Nancy blinked again. Her eyes looked even wider than usual, surrounded by subtle mascara and eyeliner, making the blue stand out starkly against her features. She looked so beautiful it made Steve’s heart clench. Although she was wearing more makeup than usual, her lips were still coated in nothing but her usual lip gloss. Steve hated looking at it. He hated that he still knew how it would taste.

“What?” Nancy asked after a second, looking around.

Steve frowned, holding up his keys. “Your brother said you were ditching. Unless you’d rather stay...?”

He trailed off, and Nancy quickly found her tongue. She shook her head. “Oh, right. Yeah, let’s... sorry, I didn’t know he was going to ask you.” She apologized as she set down her glass and threw away her napkin.

Steve frowned. “Is that a problem?”

“No! No, of course not,” she amended quickly. “As long as you’re okay with it.”

“I think I’ve gotta be,” Steve said, his voice lighthearted. “I’ve basically become the kids’ chauffeur at this point. Just, you know, without the compensation.”

Nancy took a moment to say goodbye to her mother, giving a quick assurance that she’d take care of Mike and not stay up too late. Steve

cast a look to his own parents, wondering if he should let them know he was leaving, but they were immersed in conversation and he knew they could figure it out on their own. He'd ditched parties before. He'd get a lecture later from his dad about the importance of socializing, but it'd be half-hearted and tired, judging by the unfocused look already in his dad's eyes.

They made their way to the door, walking slowly to leave time for the boys to catch up. Neither of them wanted to wait outside in the cold. He could feel Nancy's eyes on him, but he didn't look back at her. He wasn't really eager to see her expression.

They stopped by the coat rack in the foyer, each grabbing their respective garments. Steve shrugged his on easily, but Nancy's arm got stuck in one of the sleeves. He almost reached out before he stopped himself at the last minute.

Boyfriends helped with coats. He wasn't her boyfriend.

Luckily she pulled it on after only a moment's struggle. As soon as it was on, Steve suddenly felt like an asshole for just standing there.

Before he could do anything about that, Nancy was looking up at him again, and this time Steve couldn't look away.

"I think it's really great, you know," Nancy said, her voice genuine and sweet. "That you're friends with them. They could use someone like you."

"Yeah well," he said. He wasn't sure how to respond to that. The kids did this too-- shone him in some light that he didn't deserve to have on him. Like he was some goddamn hero just because he didn't have any other friends. "I've got nothing better to do."

Nancy's eyes dropped, and Steve could feel the judgement rolling off of her. Or maybe that was just his own shame. He wasn't completely sure. Either way it made him feel sick. It wasn't Nancy's fault Steve was bored and lonely. Maybe if he'd just stopped being an asshole for one *second* she wouldn't have--

"We going?" Mike's bright and eager voice rang out from beside

them, making Steve jolt slightly. He'd never jumped like this before all of this stuff had gone down, but he figured he'd earned the right to be a bit jumpy every now and then.

He glanced back to see Mike and Lucas both with stuffed pockets and more napkin-wrapped sweets in their hands. They grabbed their coats quickly and looked at him expectantly.

"Yeah, let's do this," Steve said with a sigh. He ruffled Mike's hair in an irritating fashion as Nancy pulled the door open, chuckling at the way Mike pushed him away.

The drive was somehow both too loud and too quiet simultaneously. Lucas and Mike were talking loudly in the backseat, recalling stories of all the terrible conversations they'd had at the party, which quickly turned into a competition for who had the worst interaction of the night. There was barely a moment's silence, which was to be expected when the kids were involved.

The front seat, on the other hand, was nothing but quiet. Nancy hadn't said anything since they'd left the house. He'd see her open her mouth every now and then before closing it and staring back at the road intensely. Steve wasn't any better. He focused on driving and entertained himself with the air conditioning and radio controls whenever they stopped at a light.

He hadn't given her a ride since Halloween. She'd been in a weird mood from the moment he'd picked her up. He hadn't asked her about it, hoping that if they just ignored it she'd forget it and have a good time that night.

What a joke.

Luckily the Byers didn't live too far, and they were there before there was a chance for the awkwardness to get unbearable. He pulled into the uneven driveway and pushed the car into park.

Lucas and Mike were out of the car before he knew it, shouting thanks in his direction and knocking eagerly on the front door, which opened quickly. The yellow light from the Byers's house flooded onto the porch, and it looked so warm and inviting compared to the harsh

winter air outside.

“Are you going to go back to the party?” Nancy asked, breaking the silence that had now engulfed them. He wasn’t sure why she was still here with him, and he wasn’t sure if he wanted her to leave or stay.

“Probably not,” he answered honestly. There wasn’t any point, and he’d much rather just go home, change into his pajamas, and watch Charlie’s Angels until he fell asleep on the couch.

There was a long moment’s silence where Steve waited anxiously for her to just open the door and get out. His eyes were still on the Byers’ door, and his heart was beating quickly. He just wanted her to leave before someone-- *Jonathan*-- came to check on her. He could barely handle Nancy alone. He definitely couldn’t handle the both of them.

“You should come in,” Nancy offered, cutting through the quiet once again. “There’s plenty of room, and I’m sure the kids would love it if you stayed.”

*Yeah but you wouldn’t*, Steve wanted to throw back. He swallowed instead, keeping the words down deep.

“I just--” Steve started. He wanted to make some excuse, some better plan that would maybe keep him from looking so pathetic, but he was just tired. He sighed, shaking his head. “I just can’t?”

He finally looked at her, the words traveling up in tone as if it was a question. As if he was trying to see if she understood. She drew back slightly on the words, that fucking guilt flashing in her eyes again.

Steve squeezed his eyes shut and gripped the steering wheel. He wished he was better at this, better at the words and the sentiments so that he didn’t just trip over himself constantly and make everything so much worse. “Not that-- you and Byers-- it’s not that... I’m just tired.”

*I’m tired and I’ve gotta crash. I wouldn’t be able to stay up for a movie. Thanks for the offer, maybe another time?* That’s what it was supposed to sound like, some half-assed excuse that would save him his pride. Instead, it came out like some honest confession of how much of a



mess he'd become.

Nancy looked at him sadly, and Steve had no idea what she was thinking. Her lips were pressed into a firm line, how they did when she was trying to keep from either crying or yelling. Steve didn't want to know which one she was closer to.

"I understand," Nancy said quietly. Steve nodded, fingers drumming anxiously on the steering wheel. She glanced at him before grabbing the door handle. "Thanks for the ride, Steve."

He nodded again. His whole body felt on edge after that slight confession he'd given moments earlier. He felt restless, and he knew it showed. "Tell the kids I'm sorry I couldn't stay? That I..."

"Yeah, of course," Nancy said after he faded off. "I'll make something up."

He gave her a small smile in thanks, though it still felt forced. "Happy Thanksgiving, Nancy."

"You too."

She made her way out of the car, closing the door gently behind her and walked to the porch. She knocked politely, but pushed it open on her own after a moment's pause. The same light from before covered the porch and Nancy in a warm glow, and something about it made Steve want to run to it. He watched as she looked into the house, her eyes catching on something (someone) that made her eyes light up even more and a smile spread across her face.

The door shut behind her, and Steve suddenly felt very cold, even with the heater on full blast.

### **Author's Note:**

Anyway it's finals week and I want to die and I have work all day and a final tomorrow and I just got a 68 on a paper so if you leave me a comment I may cry.